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ABSTRACT

A study examined the discourse sequences and routines through which older adults disclose their ages to others. Data are drawn from conversations between women, who were asked to "get to know each other," and interviews with 34 women and 6 men in an elderly day care center. The second source group was used only to support the distribution evidence from the first group. Disclosure of chronological age (DCA) occurred in 75% of the intergenerational conversations and in 80% of the elderly interviews. In the intergenerational conversations, the older participant generally disclosed her age first, and in the interviews, the older adult generally disclosed age early in the interaction, and often in response to questions about health. From the analysis of DCA discourse contexts, it is concluded that elderly DCA can be treated as functional and strategic. What particularly seems to distinguish early age-related discourse is the multiple-layering of identity and "face" considerations. Face can also be lost during DCA sequences. It appears that DCA offers an opportunity for elderly individuals to evaluate, within conversation, where they stand developmentally. (MSE)

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AGE IDENTITY AND ELDERLY DISCLOSURE OF CHRONOLOGICAL AGE*

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Variably, at different points in the life-span[1], taboos and normative prescriptions are associated with both seeking and providing information about age. Children and adolescents are often asked to tell their age by distant relatives or new acquaintances, or have this information revealed for them by parents or guardians. Inquiring about age in these contexts, to the extent that it is more than ritualised, seems to be part of a signalling of engagement and perhaps nurturance by well-meaning adults interested in following the growth and development of the young. In the middle years of life, age-in-years, and perhaps all discussion of own age, drops out of unmarked usage, appearing to feature predominantly in mock-denigrating remarks about the passing of time, references to the unwanted arrival of birthdays, commercially promoted through the greetings-card industry[2].

The admixture of fear, reticence and regret with which, facetiously or not, middle-aged adults appear to represent their experiences of ageing, and the consequent teasing and chiding of those whose ageing comes up for review, undoubtedly form part of the interactional means by which negative images of ageing and the elderly are reproduced. Images crassly invoked here amount to a checklist of negative elderly stereotypes: frailty, sexual inactivity, incompetence, grouchiness, unsociability, and so on. Within this 'calendar-marking' tradition and associated discourses, personal life-spans are viewed as incremented scales with natural boundaries which are bench-marks to decrement: physical, social and socio-psychological. Decade-boundaries seem to have a particular salience in this respect, as do transitions from one generational category to another (parent to grandparent, for example). Multi-disciplinary investigations of these phenomena have, as far as we know, yet to be done.

In old age, the life-span territory we explore in this paper, age-in-years re-surfaces from its underground life. The data we draw on, from two audio-recorded contexts, confirm the prevalence of disclosing chronological age (DCA) among at least some elderly groups. Given the pejorative associations of advancing age among younger groups (as we have speculatively sketched it), we are led to ask why elderly DCA might be not only 'tolerated' but positively construed on occasions. The particular aim of the paper is therefore to consider the social functioning of DCA in context, and to achieve this through examining the discursive sequences and routines through which, in our data, age-disclosure is managed. Our interpretations are couched in terms of age-identity (cf. J. Coupland, N. Coupland, Giles and Henwood, submitted), and more particularly the various elderly-identifications that DCA can encode.

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The data context

The first and primary data-set for this report is a corpus of 40 videotaped interactions where pairs of volunteer subjects, women aged 70-87 and 30-40 years (referred to here, for convenience, as 'elderly' and 'young'), were asked to 'get to know one another'. Participants, who had never met previously, were given no further instructions and were left alone, knowing they were being video-recorded, for eight minutes. (Each pair was also recorded for two minutes after their get-acquainted session, unaware that cameras were still running, though these two sub-contexts are not distinguished in this report.) The elderly women, most with (grossly characterised) upper-working-class backgrounds, were members of two Day Centres in Cardiff, Wales; most lived alone and were widowed. The young women were mostly lower-middle-class and married, and were recruited through an advertisement in a local newspaper. 20 of the dyads were intergenerational (young-old); 10 were peer-young and 10 peer-elderly. According to the study-design, therefore, each subject participated in two interactions, one within- and one across-generation. All relevant sequences were transcribed (using notation developed from that of Jefferson, as summarised in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). The longer, numbered, transcribed extracts reproduced below are all taken from this first source, and are used to illustrate the contextualisation of DCA. (Each of the 40 interactions is identified with a two-digit reference-number: I01 - I40; elderly participants are numbered E01 - E20, and young participants as Y01 - Y20.)

A supplementary corpus was available in the form of a series of interviews with 40 elderly people (34 women and 6 men). The population were volunteers from one of the two Day Centres attended by the 20 elderly females who took part in the primary interactive study. In these interviews, three researchers asked a series of questions on the subject of experiences of health care (the questions are detailed below). This second source is used here only to support the distributional evidence from the first study. (Brief transcribed fragments from this second study are attributed to speakers identified by [fictionalised] initials.)

Age-disclosure: distributional overviews

Though the principal interest of this paper is the qualitative analysis of how DCA is contextualised in discourse, we begin with quantitative overviews simply to establish that elderly DCA is a robust generational phenomenon. Within the (primary) interactive data-set, intergenerational conversations are the preferred contexts for DCA (15 disclosures in 20 interactions), most by older speakers (12, or 60% of possible elderly DCAs to young interlocutors). Each of the 3 young DCAs in the intergenerational condition is made after (though not immediately after) an elderly DCA. In 2 cases (I14 and I19), the young person comes to disclose her age through herself having asked her elderly interlocutor how old her daughter/son is, and then proclaiming herself a similar age: that is, the young person aligns with the succeeding generation. In one other case (I25), E13 asks Y13 her age and comments <u>you're like one of my granddaughters</u>, again aligning generationally. DCA hardly occurs among peer-elders, and in the 2 interactions (4 disclosures) where it does, there

is a possibly significant age-difference between interlocutors (86-70; 77-66). The older woman discloses her age first, and the younger woman reciprocates this disclosure within the same discourse sequence. Of the peer-young DCAs (5 disclosures in 3 interactions), 2 pairs (in I11 and I37) are again matched in immediate sequence.

Given the small numbers in the interactive data set, it is useful to compare patterns of DCA in the interview corpus. In 32 of the 40 interviews, elderly interviewees disclosed their chronological age. In 6 of the others too, own age is referred to without being specified as age-in-years. For example, (VH) otherwise I can't grumble at all like (.) well not for my age; (GM) oh well I mean to say you can expect it at my time of life. Hence own age is explicitly or implicitly invoked by interviewees in all but 2 cases (see J. Coupland et al., submitted, for discussion of a wider range of elderly identity-marking processes). DCAs were spontaneous in the sense that questions asked[23] did not directly implicate age. The first move made by interviewers was a supposedly phatic opening: 'How are you?', uniformly with primary stress on the final syllable. The second (and the first 'content' question) was 'How is your health generally?', with a supplementary question, if needed: 'Are you receiving treatment for any health problems at the moment?' The third was 'Do you see your GP [general practitioner] often? Are you seeing him/her at the moment?'. The attested DCAs were distributed across the data in responses to questions as follows:

'How are you?':	8
'How is your health generally?':	16
'Do you see your GP often?' :	2
'Do you think doctors generally provide good health-care for elderly people?':	4
Later follow-up questions:	2

DCA is hence not only frequent (80%) in the supplementary corpus, but it tends to occur early in the interviews, and particularly in response to a direct invitation to appraise own health. In fact, the above distribution might suggest that the explicit or implicit thematisation of health (if health is taken by the elderly respondents to be implicated in an otherwise phatic 'How are you?') establishes a relevance for DCA. This relationship is explored in detail in the following qualitative analyses. Overall, we take the supplementary corpus as confirming the emergent pattern from the interactive study -- that DCA is a regular feature of the talk of at least some groups of elderly people, particularly in cross-generational contexts.

The discourse of Chronological Age Disclosure.

From a decontextualised perspective, the simple frequency of elderly DCA might be taken as evidence that age-in-years has shed its pejorative associations for older people. The importance of a discourse analytic perspective here, focussing on the staging of disclosive sequences, is that it immediately shows DCA to be involved in complex, diverse and even contradictory presentational activities, where old age is neither wholly negatively nor positively construed. The general position we adopt in this section, then, is that chronological age is most appropriately seen as an identity-token. We conceive of DCA as a 'counter' whose value is determined

to a significant extent by its placement and timing in an interaction, and which is 'played' in the pursuance of particular strategic ends. In adopting this position, we are clearly rejecting the assumption that DCA is the revealing of one among many items of personal information, as the term 'self-disclosure' seems to imply (see also J. Coupland, N. Coupland, Giles and Wiemann, 1988).

In fact, many DCAs in the interactive data do share a normative view of old age as decremental. So, in Extract 1, E02 discloses her age (at line 11) in the context of identifying her own frailty:

Extract 1
(From I02)

line		
1	E02	but today they don't want to know you
2	Y02	mm=
3	E02	I have a (.) nephew living up at the top of the road
4	Y02	yes
5	E02	but I don't see=
6	Y02	=you don't see him?
7	E02	[((don't want to know you)) (.) not
8		unless I run up there
9	Y02	yes=
10	E02	=and I'm I'm not very well these days too (.) I'm
11		seventy last Octob=
12	Y02	=were you?=
13	E02	=this October=
14	Y02	=ah
15	E02	so I I find I can't do it so good
16	Y02	[ ] [yes you don't want to overdo
17		things ((do you?))

The statement I'm seventy...this October so I find I can't do it so good presupposes there to be a natural relationship between ageing and immobility, and age-in-years is thus offered as a rationalising account of E02's frailty. Whereas in our speculations about middle-age, we suggested that advancing years could project incompetence or debilitation, we see that, in later life, acknowledged frailty can in fact be somewhat off-set through self-presenting as chronologically old.

This accounting pattern in the management of DCA is very common in both data-sets. In the supplementary corpus, worsening health (reported in response to the health-appraisal question) is often directly attributed to chronological age, for example:

(SM) as well as I can be...I'll tell you first I'm going on ninety;
(CH) oh not very good (.) well I'm almost eighty and I can't expect much;
(MM) not on top of the world but...when you come to eighty-three years of age you can't expect to be like a spring chicken can you?;
(GT) I haven't been too well...because...of course I'm getting on now I'll be eighty next year.

One interviewee in the corpus reponds to the interviewer's how is your health generally would you say? as follows: (GJ) (sighing) well my dear (.) well you haven't asked me how old I am, implying she cannot even attempt an own-health-appraisal independently of considerations of age. The accounting can be done defensively, rather than expressed as resignation. BD, for example, says that at eighty-four? I've got a right to be (a bit stiff) don't you think?. In a small number of instances (though still worryingly), the ill-health being accounted for by age is reportedly an attribution made by medical practitioners:

(FM) as soon as you've got something wrong with you they say 'how old are you? ...oh well you can't expect much more at your age' (.) they're not interested as far as I'm concerned (.) in my experience once you get to seventy...they put it down to your age whatever it is...I don't think it's right.

On the other hand, several elderly individuals invoke the age/ill-health norm of association specifically to differentiate themselves from it.

Extract 2
(from I03)

line		
1	YO1	...I'm just a housewife now...well not just
2		is it really? (.) because my children are at school
		[ ]
3	EO1	(laughing) yes
4	EO1	mm (1.0) oh well that's nice isn't it?
5	YO1	yes=
6	EO1	=mm (1.5) well I lead quite a busy life although
7		I'm eighty-six I'm not young (laughs)
		[
8	YO1	gosh you don't look it!
9	EO1	I was eighty-six last May
		[
10	YO1	goodness you certainly don't look that...

In Extract 2, EO1 aligns herself with the younger woman's active lifestyle (well I lead quite a busy life), despite her age (although I'm eighty-six I'm not young). The expression 'good for one's age' has conventionalised precisely this association in everyday usage. EO1 refuses to align herself with the perceived norm for eighty-six. Likewise, WJ (in the interview data) comes to a positive self-appraisal in relation to her age: I'm eighty so I haven't done bad; LD similarly: mind I'm gone eighty I'm going eighty one!...and I think I'm pretty good.

Whereas DCA in the accounting pattern mitigates the negative associations of actual frailty, in this second disjunctive usage DCA allows the discloser to claim credit against normative expectations of frailty which are not in fact realised. Strategically, therefore, for the elderly individuals concerned, disclosing age carries very different identity-potential in the two formulations. But at the same time, accounting and disjunctive patterns find their meanings in a single set of underlying assumptions about the nature of ageing itself. In both cases, chronological

age is established as one pole of a relational evaluation, the other pole being 'actual', experienced life-position or what we can call (following Rubin and Rubin, 1986) 'contextual age'. It is as if ageing is dually represented: first in chronological terms, as predictable, even ineluctable progression along an incremented scale; second in contextual terms, as a far less predictable ebbing and flowing, reflecting the arrival and passing of particular somatic, experiential and emotional circumstances (for example, illness, bereavement or institutionalisation). We might model chronological and contextual age as two indicators advancing (since decline is the unmarked trend in the contextual dimension too) in parallel along a single graduated life-span template. If so, then DCA can be seen to be involved, in the cases we have considered, in negotiating the precise relationship between the two indicators. We can speculate that, in a broadly ageist attitudinal climate (Levin and Levin, 1980), for most adult individuals on most occasions, there will be a preference to retard progress in both chronological and contextual dimensions. But that, given the inevitability of time-passing, there will be a preference for contextual age to 'lag behind' chronological age.

We need not doubt the negotiability of the relative positioning. Firstly, it is apparent that contextual age is an essentially subjective, global appraisal. Evaluating 'how one is' in ageing is open to moment-to-moment redefinition, depending not only on changing circumstances but on the shifting salience of particular contributing factors. There would appear to be a real sense in which we cannot know 'how we are', and another in which, if we did know, we would predictably be unable to represent this knowledge in any coherent, packaged formulation to others. Indeed, the responses to health-appraisal questions (quoted above) have an overtly negotiative quality to them, often qualified or hedged, and appealing to particular standards of judgement. As Jefferson (1985) has noted, too, they often function as 'glosses' to be 'unpackaged' in subsequent exchanges.

A crucial further consideration is that life-positional evaluations are not made unilaterally. In the evaluative process, the judgements most pertinent to subjects themselves may in fact be those of others, giving further justification for expecting age-identities to be <u>discursively</u> managed. In the extracts we have already considered, young recipients (of elderly DCA) can be seen providing diverse modes of support to elderly self-projections (cf. N. Coupland, Henwood, J. Coupland and Giles, 1988). In Extract 1, Y02 elects to endorse the elderly person's presented frailty: she says <u>you don't want to overdo things ((do you?))</u>. In Extract 2, Y01's effusive responses (<u>gosh you don't look it!</u>... <u>goodness you certainly don't look that...</u>) seem to be <u>required</u> if E01's disjunctive inference (that she is contextually 'younger' than eighty-six) is to be credited. In Extract 3, Y13 does even more explicit consolidatory work in response to E13's DCA:

Extract 3
(from I25)

line		
1	Y13	have you got any family?
2	E13	I have a daughter
3	Y13	does she does <u>she</u> live in Cardiff?
		[ ] [
4	E13	she she's living in Pencoed

```
 5        near Bridgend ...
 6   E13  she comes up every Tuesday and er (.) we go shopping
 7        and have a run around you know
 8   Y13  you haven't got any grandchildren
               [    ]
 9   E13         she
10        yes I have er (laughs) I have (coughs) two grandchildren
             [        ]
11   Y13       (laughs)
12   E13  and I have four great grandchildren (laughs)
                              [       ]         [
13   Y13                       (gasps)           (laughs)
14   Y13  oh! nice yes (.) you don't look that old (laughs)
          [              ]                      [
15   E13  they're lovely                         (laughs)
16   E13  oh yes
17   Y13  (quietly) oh dear
18   E13  well I'm seventy-seven
19   Y13  (high pitch) really?
20   E13  yes (laughs)
              [
21   Y13       I thought you were sort of sixty I just assumed
                                                 [
22   E13                                          did you oh
23        that's nice
24   Y13  yeah yeah it's funny most people I know who are
25        seventy-seven aren't (gasps) dashing in and out of Day
26        Centres (.) oh that's nice (.) oh
```

At lines 10-12, where E13 is telling she has grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the stylistic key signalled by accompanying laughter seems interactionally significant. E13 laughs (first) presumably because she thinks Y13 will think that having great-grandchildren is surprising. Y13 duly gasps, and verbalises the disjunction between her interlocutor's appearance and her generational role: she (line 14) compliments E13 that she doesn't look that old. The DCA (at line 18) will predictably elicit another comment on the disjunction, this time between appearance and chronological age. Seventy-seven supposedly is that old, though E13 apparently is 'better than' her age, in the judgement both of Y13 (I thought you were sort of sixty) and presumably of E13 herself. Surprise-at-age is encoded verbally in lines 14 (oh!) and 19 (really?), and prosodically throughout the responses.

Such compliments and gifts of praise find their force as attempts to deny an interlocutor's decrement, sometimes in highly particular respects.

Extract 4
(from I33)
(Y18 has been telling how her mother's house has been burgled)

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line
 1   Y18  ...and that's made her nervous you know I think once
 2        something like that
                                  [
 3   E18                           yes (.) of course (.) how
```

4 old is she?
5 Y18 she's seventy-two
6 E18 I'm seventy-eight
7 Y18 (astonished) are you?
8 E18 yes
9 Y18 (gasps) gosh you're marvellous aren't you?
10 E18 (laughing slightly) I don't know
11 Y18 oh gosh you are I'd never have thought (.) you've got
12 lovely skin (puts hands up to cheeks, forward lunge,
laughs) you have haven't you?
13 E18 (puts hands up to cheeks, forward lunge, laughs) oh I
14 don't know (laughs)
15 Y18 (emphatically) oh you have!=
16 E18 =yeah
17 Y18 my mother (.) looks the same sort as you
[
18 E18 does she?
[
19 Y18 she she looks
[
20 E18 yes yes
21 Y18 younger than her age and she's got a great outlook on life...

In Extract 4, Y18 (at lines 11/12) compliments E18 saying she has lovely skin, and goes on to give an explicit rationale. She classifies her elderly interlocutor alongside her own mother (and in a highly depersonalised way, saying she looks the same sort), who she says looks younger than her age. It is the older woman in this sequence who has initial responsibility for introducing the theme of chronological age, and she of course volunteers her own age, perhaps seeking some expression of surprise-at-age. Still, it appears that inviting interlocutors to participate in age-identity appraisals can carry heavy costs to elderly disclosers as well as benefits. Y18's extended accounting for her assessment surely takes her into intrusive and patronising talk, which paradoxically threatens the positive identity she presumably seeks to build (cf. N. Coupland, J. Coupland, Giles and Henwood, 1988)

Responses to DCA seem to find a particular salience in the lexical item marvellous (in Extract 4, line 9, and very frequently in the data). It is used as if to identify a global attribute of people, 'you are marvellous', though its referent is conventionally more specific: global health/wellbeing. Its force is credit-giving and of course complimenting but also conveying suprise. Also, its meaning is implicitly relational (far more so than in the sense that the whole class of attributives are). It evaluates wellbeing in relation to circumstances - either ill fortune, ill health or old age, and therefore is directly apposite in this context. On the other hand, in our view, marvellous smacks of residualism, implying that individuals have endured their unfortunate lot with noteworthy and unusual success. Arguably, therefore, it plays some small part in alienating and fossilizing the elderly, however well the compliment might be received in face-to-face encounters. The conventionality of the term's association with age/health evaluations allows it to act in its own right as a trigger for DCA:

Extract 5
(from I04, a peer-elderly interaction; E01 has been telling E02 how she found her husband dead in bed only three weeks after his retirement.)

line		
1	E02	what a shock for you!
		[
2	E01	yes it was a shock yes
3	E02	oh it's marvellous you're like you are isn't it
4	E01	well (.) I'm eighty-six last May ((3 sylls.)) (laughs)
		[ ]
5	E02	oh god
6	E02	you can give me a few years
7	E01	so I'm not a youngster really
		[
8	E02	just gone seventy
9	E01	mm I was eighty-six last May
		[
10	E02	(quietly) marvellous (tuts)

In Extract 5 (line 3), E02 is being sympathetic about the shock E01 has suffered and says it is marvellous she is as she is. The sense of marvellous is already relational here; E02 is giving a global positive assessment of E01's state of wellbeing in relation to the particular loss she has suffered - the death of her husband. E01's DCA at line 4, following directly form E02's marvellous, extends the basis of the relational assessment. She is marvellous more generally than E02 has recognised -- in relation to her chronological life-position as a whole. She adds another standard of comparison, and of course thereby accepts the compliment, endorsing and even developing its basis, implicitly indulging in self-congratulation.

Overview

We are aware that many other key processes and issues in DCA management have yet to be considered. Future discussions of the contextualisation of DCA will need to explore at least (a) variability in the encoding of DCAs (for example stative versus progressive references to own age); (b) the pre-contexts to DCA, and thus the means by which elderly people variously engineer opportunities to disclose age or respond to contextual pressures to disclose; (c) processes differentiating DCA management by 'young' (where they do disclose age) and 'elderly' and their sub-groups; and (d) cross-situational variability. Despite the limited range of issues we have been able to explore here, we feel justified in highlighting a few key interpretive points.

First, there seems to be ample justification for treating elderly DCA as functional and strategic. That is, though the task-requirement in the interactive study was, to an extent, to disclose, we need to account for the uneven distribution of DCA across elderly and young groups; also for the sheer pervasiveness of elderly DCA in both environments. In the interview corpus, though we have recognised that health and wellbeing enter a predictable relationship with considerations of age, no specific references to age were made by researchers in the interviews. Hence, the

relationship of health to chronological age is one established by elderly interviewees themselves in these data. In any event, our own previous research has already established that own ill-health is itself a highly productive topic area in unscripted intergenerational talk (cf. N. Coupland, J. Coupland, Giles, Henwood and Wiemann, 1988).

What particularly seems to distinguish elderly age-related discourse is the multiple-layering of identity and 'face' considerations. In the middle years, many would see disclosing age as an act which (in the terminology of Brown and Levinson, 1987) threatens a discloser's face -- both her negative face (the right to privacy and personal integrity) and her positive face (the wish to be well-regarded). During face-to-face interaction in later life, more directly face-threatening circumstances can be apparent to interlocutors, either through other categories of disclosure (cf. N. Coupland, J. Coupland, Giles, Henwood and Wiemann, 1988) or inferentially on stereotypical grounds (cf. Henwood, N. Coupland, Giles and J. Coupland, submitted). Under these conditions, the token of disclosing age may be played, as we have seen, to contextualise and so redress the more salient threat-to-face. Again, given that many elders' chronological ages will be 'in advance of' their contextual circumstances (they will be 'good for their ages'), the token then needs to be played to claim the credit that is due, and to promote positive face.

Still, we have also seen that face-loss can simultaneously be incurred during DCA sequences. First, the elderly discloser openly accepts whatever negative associations old age in itself stereotypically connotes. Then again, motivated self-disclosure risks being construed as egocentricity, which is readily accommodated within the stereotype of elderly talk. Most strikingly, DCA appears to invite, in response, behaviours which are otherwise counter-normative -- particularly the making of overt judgements and evaluations of others on the basis of appearance (cf. Berger and Bradac, 1983), processes which clearly threaten negative face. In this way, the disclosure of age, as we have previously argued in respect of quite different categories of elderly self-disclosure, paradoxically entails threats to the elderly identity it is designed to protect or enhance.

If these considerations seem to swing the balance away from DCA as functional in identity terms, we should not underestimate the existential function of interactional sequences in general, and perhaps particularly for the elderly (cf., again, N. Coupland, J. Coupland, Giles, Henwood and Wiemann, 1988). Several commentators in social gerontology have portrayed ageing as a time of radical uncertainty, and a time for coming to terms with some form of social 'disengagement', not as a socio-biological necessity (as some have argued; cf. Cumming and Henry, 1961) but rather as a societal imposition. Mutran and Reitzes (1981), for example, find the lack of community activities after retirement to be the strongest predictor of an older identity. Role-loss is well-established as an elderly characteristic (cf. Bengston, 1973; Kuypers and Bengston, 1973). Little wonder if the scarce resource of new first acquaintances (as it certainly is for the populations in the present data-sets) is employed by elderly people partly as a touchstone for evaluating where they stand developmentally, and for modifying this self-conception. Age-disclosure, as we have begun to characterise it in this paper, seems to offer one coherent

set of interactional possibilities to enact this negotiation of one's status as 'elderly', and of one's own projectable self.

Notes

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[1] The data being reported in this paper, together with our initial speculations, are of course highly culture-specific, relating primarily to contemporary Anglo, and perhaps middle-class, groups in the UK. We eagerly invite correspondence particularly on the issue of cross-cultural variation in respect of age-disclosure in particular, and the sociolinguistics of ageing in general. Correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Nikolas Coupland, Centre for Applied English Language Studies, University of Wales College of Cardiff, Cardiff CF1 3EU.

[2] Some current examples of the genre carry messages such as: 'Twenty-nine again??'; 'Forty isn't old... if you're a tree'; 'Still nifty at fifty'; and 'Happy birthday to a unique person... most people your age are dead'.

[3] Interviewers were in fact trained, for purposes beyond our immediate interests here, to question interviewees in accordance with very precise encoding guidelines, with prosodic uniformity as well as identical forms of words in scripted initial exchanges.

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